

2020Dec\_USFWS

**From:** Bush, Jodi

**Sent:** Friday, December 18, 2020 9:00 AM

As you are aware, Grizzly bears are expanding across their range, particularly adjacent to the Greater Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems, and verified grizzly bear sightings adjacent to and within the Bitterroot Ecosystem (BE) have increased in recent years.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires federal agencies, in consultation with and with the assistance of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), to insure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species such as the grizzly bear. To assist agencies and prospective applicants evaluate whether or not proposed actions may affect grizzly bear, the USFWS can provide information upon request about whether the species “may be present” in or around a project area.

The Grizzly Bear Recovery Office along with Ecological Services offices across ID, MT, WA, and WY developed a “May Be Present” methodology over the last year as a proactive way to meet these requirements under the ESA. We have intentionally included you: our federal, state, and tribal partners in its development and review.

The “May Be Present” methodology uses current distributions and verified outlier data and will be updated annually, or more frequently, if new information becomes available. A map that results from the methodology is intended to be spatially inclusive of all areas that meet the “may be present” methodology for grizzly bears and should not be confused with “current distribution” (areas in which grizzly bears have established home ranges and continuously reside).

The accompanying letter and attachments explain the finalized “May Be Present” methodology. I have also included an initial iteration of a map based on what we know now about grizzly bear expansion across the range. This map will be more appropriately viewed on our Service grizzly bear website: <https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/es/grizzlybear.php> and will be extremely useful to our Federal partners as a project planning tool.

In its consideration of the “May Be Present” methodology, the Service encourages the Federal Agencies through their Level 1 Streamlining Teams to coordinate with the Service’s Grizzly Bear Recovery Office when evaluating proposed projects for potential impacts to grizzly bears in order to utilize the best scientific information available, including the most recent verified sighting information. Additionally, because State agencies are a key partner in grizzly bear conservation, Level 1 Teams Streamlining Teams should contact them early in conversations on proposed projects to ensure the latest grizzly bear biological information is considered.

As always, we appreciate your efforts in grizzly bear conservation. If you have questions or concerns, please call the appropriate Service Office (Washington: Brad Thompson at [Brad\\_Thompson@fws.gov](mailto:Brad_Thompson@fws.gov) ; Idaho: Chris Swanson at [Christopher\\_Swanson@fws.gov](mailto:Christopher_Swanson@fws.gov) ; Wyoming: Tyler Abbott at [Tyler\\_Abbott@fws.gov](mailto:Tyler_Abbott@fws.gov); Grizzly Bear Recovery Office: Hilary Cooley, Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator at [Hilary\\_Cooley@fws.gov](mailto:Hilary_Cooley@fws.gov), or myself for Montana). Thank you. JB

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